

Amanda Price
Commissioner

www.DPS.Alaska.Gov

STATE OF ALASKA



Department of
Public Safety

Anchorage, Alaska

PRESS RELEASE

Governor Dunleavy Prioritizes Public Safety in Annual Address

Public Safety Remains Job Number One for the Dunleavy Administration

January 29, 2021 (Anchorage, AK) – Governor Mike Dunleavy highlighted a number of accomplishments and priorities of the Alaska Department of Public Safety during his annual State of the State Address. Since taking office the governor has charged his public safety team to continue to make public safety job number one for his administration.

"Governor Dunleavy has made it clear that the safety of all Alaskans is his top priority, and that is the goal that I have worked tirelessly towards over the last two years with the countless professionals that work for the Department of Public Safety," said **Alaska Department of Public Safety Commissioner Amanda Price**. "I am proud of all that my department and its dedicated employees have accomplished to meet the governor's charge and make Alaska a safer state."

Public Safety Highlights of Governor Dunleavy's 2021 Address:

"Today, I'm happy to report that our communities are filled with less crime and more troopers. Thanks to the brave work of Alaska's finest, we experienced a 10 percent drop in crime last year."

The [Crime in Alaska Report](#) released in 2020 reported an across the board 10% drop in crime statewide. The number of reported offenses is the second lowest level in five years, mirroring the national downward trend in crime rates. [Read more.](#)

"We trained a historic number of recruits at the Alaska State Trooper Academy and are on track to do so again in 2021."

Under the Dunleavy administration, the Alaska State Troopers and Alaska Wildlife Troopers have put a record number of trooper recruits through the DPS academy to bolster their ranks statewide. [Read more.](#)

The Alaska Law Enforcement Training Academy in Sitka, Alaska has plans for two full academies in 2021.

"We became the first of eight western states to upgrade our fingerprint system, increasing our ability to successfully identify perpetrators by 30 percent."

In the fall of 2020, the Alaska Department of Public Safety's Division of Statewide Services was the first western state to upgrade its biometric database. The latent fingerprint processing match rate improved drastically from an average of 40% prior to the upgrade to a superior 70% match rate during testing. [Read more.](#)

“We released more funds than ever before to our 35 domestic violence, child advocacy centers and emergency shelters and victim services programs.”

In the FY2021 budget, Governor Dunleavy and the Legislature approved record funding for the Counsel on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, to include an additional \$1 million of new funding for Advanced Services for Victims of Crime. [Read more.](#)

“We solved a number of long-standing cold cases, allowing the families of Sophie Sergie, Jessica Baggen, and Shelley Connolly to receive justice at long last. My administration is committed to solving every one of these cases to bring justice to every family.”

Utilizing cutting edge genetic genealogy technology, the Alaska Bureau of Investigation’s cold case unit has solved three major cold cases since Governor Dunleavy took office.

On February 15, 2019, Steven H. Downs, 44 of Auburn, Maine, was arrested and charged for the sexual assault and murder of Sophie Sergie. [Read more.](#)

On September 3, 2019 the Alaska State Troopers made an arrest in connection to the 1978 murder and sexual assault of 16-year-old Shelley Connolly. 62-year-old Donald F. McQuade of Gresham, OR, was taken into custody and charged with murder in the first degree and murder in the second degree. [Read more.](#)

On August 11, 2020 Alaska State Troopers and the Sitka Police Department announced the closure of the Jessica Baggen cold case. Steve Branch, 66 of Austin, Arkansas, the suspect of the sexual assault and murder of Jessica Baggen, killed himself on August 3, 2020, after denying to investigators that he had any knowledge of the crime and refusing to provide a DNA sample for comparison to the DNA collected on scene 24 years ago. [Read more.](#)

“And we remain on track to clear the state’s longstanding sexual assault kit testing backlog this September.”

568 sexual assault kits have been processed through the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) initiative, and four have been forwarded to prosecutors for review. [Read the 2020 SAKI Report.](#)

In November 2020, Carmen Perzechino, Jr., 59, was convicted by a jury following a three-week trial on two counts of Sexual Assault in the First Degree and one count of Kidnapping in a case that was reignited after the sexual assault kit was processed. [Read more.](#)

The Capital Project approved in 2018 is on track to be complete in September of this year. The last of the 2,568 kits from police departments statewide were sent for testing in December 2020. [Read more.](#)

Read or watch Governor Dunleavy’s entire State of the State Address at:
<https://gov.alaska.gov/newsroom/2021/01/28/2021-state-of-the-state-address/>

###

Media Contact: Austin McDaniel, Public Information Officer, austin.mcdaniel@alaska.gov, (907) 269-5413